TEXT BY BIANCA BRADBURY

One Kitten Too Many

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ONE KITTEN TOO MANY

By Bianca Bradbury
and Marie C. Nichols

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Once there was a Siamese kitten named Tabitha, Tabby for short. Her eyes were as blue as marbles. She lived in a spotless blue and yellow kitchen. She was very polite, and always said, "Please," and always said, "Thank you."

One day she was asleep on her soft cushion, when she heard a scratching. A dirty little brown nose was pushing at the kitchen door. A dirty little tiger kitten, with eyes as yellow as lemons, followed the nose.

"Come in," called Tabitha.

"I am in, am I not?" the tiger kitten said rudely. "Who are you?"

"People who like me call me Tabby," said Tabby. "Who are you, please?"

"Whiskers," said Whiskers. "And nobody likes me."

He stalked over to Tabitha's bowl of milk, and began to lap it up. "This is pretty good milk," he said. He went on lapping until it was all gone.

Then he saw Tabitha's soft blue cushion. He jumped up on it. "This is a pretty good bed," he said.

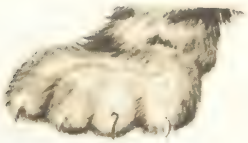
"You're welcome to it," Tabby said. "Only, in this house, we wash before we take a nap."

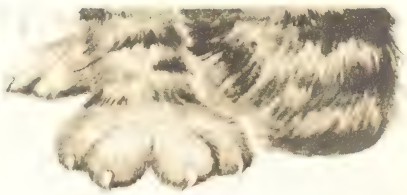
"That's silly," Whiskers said. "Washing is just a waste of time." And he shut his yellow eyes.

Well! Tabitha didn't know what to do. Nobody had ever been rude to her before in her whole life. Night came, and she began to feel sleepy, too. She curled in a ball on the hard floor, and went to sleep.

In the morning when she woke up, Whiskers was stretching and yawning. "Did you sleep well?" Tabby asked politely.

"No," Whiskers said rudely. "I hardly shut my eyes all night. That pillow of yours is too soft."





Just then both of them spied the bowl of fresh, warm milk. Whiskers spread himself over the bowl. He planted his front feet around it, so that Tabby couldn't even get her brown nose in. "This milk is half mine!" she cried.

"Oh no it isn't! First come, first served," growled Whiskers. And he lapped up every drop.

The Lady who owned the kitchen came out to do her work. Whiskers hid under the stove. The Lady looked in Tabby's bowl. "Goodness, Tabby," she said, "milk all gone? You ARE a hungry kitten this morning." Whiskers hid, while the Lady was around. But the minute she left, he came out, and went on being rude to Tabitha.

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And that was the way it went, all day long. Tabby was hungry, because Whiskers ate all her meals. And Tabby was tired, because she slept on the hard floor, while Whiskers snored happily on her soft pillow. And Tabby was cross. Not once did Whiskers say "Please." Not once did Whiskers say "Thank you."

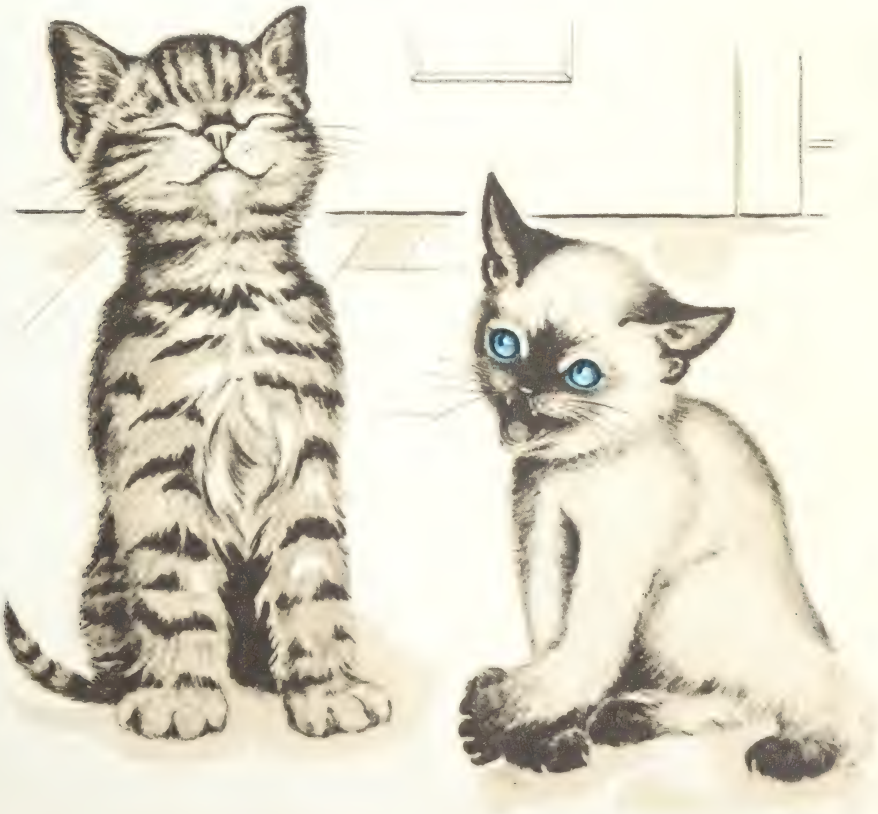
But Tabby knew that Whiskers was a guest. She had to be polite to a guest. Even when he took her cushion on the second night, she curled down on the hard floor, and didn't say a word.

So it came the third day. By that time, Tabby was very hungry, and very tired, and very cross. It came afternoon, and the two kittens were asleep, Tabby on the floor, and Whiskers on the cushion. They woke up when the Boy Who Brought The Meat opened the door.

They watched him. He put the groceries on the table. He put the milk and meat in the icebox. Then he went out again.

Whiskers sat up and sniffed. "That smells like liver," he said. He shut his eyes, dreamily. "I have smelled liver before," he said. "And I have seen liver before. But I have never, never tasted liver." He sat down in front of the icebox. "How do you open this thing?" he asked.

"We don't!" cried Tabby.



"I saw him push IN on the handle, and that shut it," Whiskers said. "So, if I pull OUT on the handle, that will open it."

He leaped through the air. He landed with all four feet wrapped around the handle.

"Get down this minute! Get down, I say!" Tabby cried.

Whiskers paid no attention. He started to jounce. The handle wiggled. The more it wiggled, the harder he jounced. Sure enough, the door began to move. It swung open. Whiskers, who was hanging on the handle, swung with it. He dropped to the floor. "There!" he said. "I did it!"

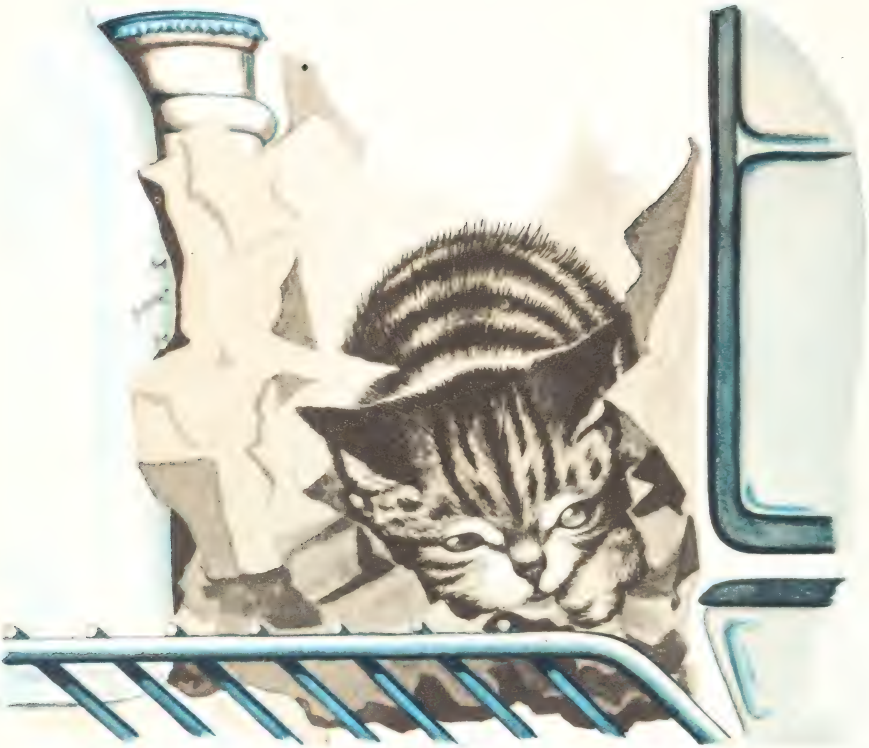
Tabby shivered, and watched. Whiskers jumped into the icebox. He browsed around the milk. He browsed past the milk bottles to the package of meat. He browsed right through the paper into the pound of fresh, tasty liver.

Tabby heard him smacking his lips. And then she heard something else. She heard the feet of the Lady coming through the door.

"Well!" said the Lady. "That's queer. The grocery boy left the icebox door open." And as Tabitha watched, with her blue eyes as big as soup plates, the Lady shut the door. With Whiskers inside.

For a moment Tabby sat there, wondering what to do. Then she rushed at the icebox. She scratched at the door. She meowed. "Please!" she cried. "Please open the door!"

The Lady picked her up and patted her. "You never begged for food before," she said. "I'm surprised at you, Tabby. But we'll see if there's just a tiny tidbit for you." And she opened the door.



There, scrunched up in a little brown ball, trying to keep himself warm, was Whiskers.

"My goodness," cried the Lady, "I didn't order a kitten! Whatever made the grocery boy leave a kitten in my icebox!" And she picked Whiskers up in her arms to warm him.

And that, THAT, was the thing that finally made Tabby mad.

She had stood for his drinking all her milk.

She had stood for his taking her soft, clean bed.

Now she saw him curled up on the Lady's arms, looking nice and polite as a little brown angel. The Lady smoothed his fur. "Poor little kitty," she said. "Would you like to be a member of our family? Tabby needs a nice playmate." She filled a bowl of milk, and put it down for Whiskers. And then she went out.

Tabby was so mad she forgot she had ever wanted to be a polite kitten. Before Whiskers could get so much as a whisker in the milk, she pushed him away. "Hey! You can't do that to me!" cried Whiskers.

"Oh, can't I?" asked Tabby. She didn't stop drinking until the milk was gone.

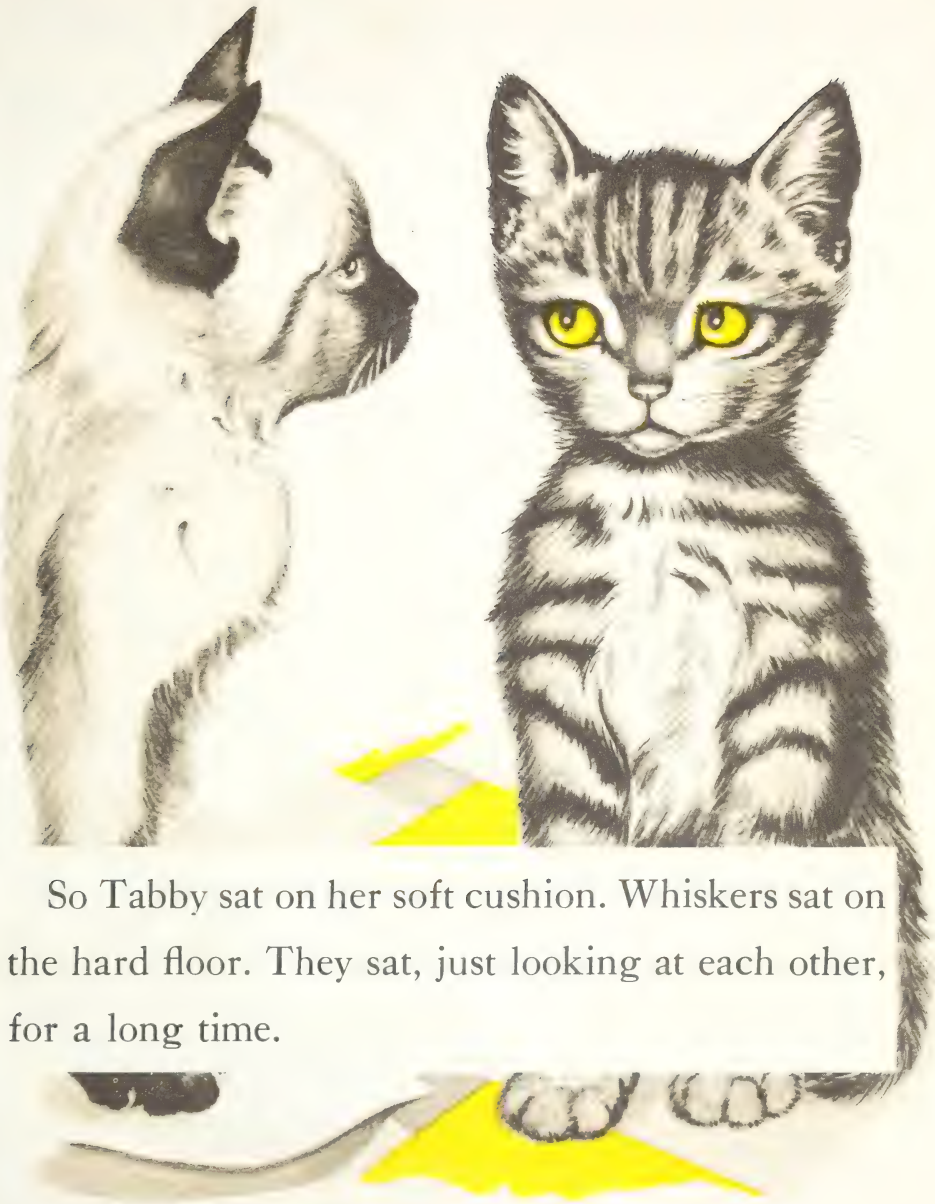
She looked around. Whiskers was sitting right in the middle of her soft blue cushion. He had a very worried look on his face. "Get off my cushion!" ordered Tabby.

Whiskers didn't move. "I'm a guest," he said. "You have to be polite to me."

"Not any more you're not!" Tabby was spitting mad. "And you're not a member of the family, either, unless I say so. You can't be a member of the family until you learn some manners. Now, get off my cushion!"

"No, I won't!" Whiskers put his ears back.

Tabby sailed through the air. She boxed one of his ears. "Now, are you going to be polite?" she asked. She didn't give him time to answer. She boxed his other ear. Whiskers jumped down.



So Tabby sat on her soft cushion. Whiskers sat on the hard floor. They sat, just looking at each other, for a long time.

It was getting night, and bed time. "Tabitha," Whiskers said in a tiny voice, "would you let me have half of your cushion?"

"What do you say?" said Tabby.

"I don't know."

"Say 'Please.' "

"Please," said Whiskers. He jumped up beside Tabby, and started to knead himself a soft place beside her.

Tabby pushed him, hard. "What do you say now?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Whiskers in an even tinier voice.

"Say 'Thank you.' "

"Thank you," said Whiskers, in the tiniest voice of all.

And they curled down together, on the soft little cushion, and went to sleep.

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